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THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

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The Elementary School Principalship

Observation and investigation¹ demonstrate that there is a wide variation in the duties allotted elementary school principals by superintendents and school officials. There is perhaps a still wider variation in the interpretation by the principals themselves of the functions of their office. Such a divergence of opinion and practise may be explained to a great degree by the almost fortuitous origin and growth of the principalship. This is largely the outcome of the need that arose in the central office for some one in each building to perform certain specified clerical and administrative duties which have been constantly increasing in quantity and broadening in scope. The principal has acted in the capacity of head teacher first, then clerk, then general manager.² His position has been evolving toward a final stage which has not yet been reached and which can not be reached until its function can be crystallized into a conscious objective in the minds of school men and women.

There is considerable indication that such a crystallization is under way as an outgrowth of the awakening professional self-consciousness in educational circles. Superintendents and teachers began to realize that the principal was here to stay and asked, "What shall we do with him?" The principals added to the query by asking, "What shall we do with ourselves? Are we performing the duties which mean most in increasing the efficiency of the public schools? Should we emphasize a certain activity more and certain other activities less, or increase or decrease the number and scope of our present obligations?"

Literature of principalship. In answer to these questionings a literature of the elementary school principalship is being developed. An examination of educational publications reveals the fact that the greater amount of this material, which is by no means large, relating to the functions of the elementary school principal has been published

¹Gray, William S. "The work of the elementary school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:24-35, September, 1918.

²Worth, McClure. "The functions of the elementary school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 21:500-14, March, 1921.

within the past five or six years. A growing interest will result in the continuance of contributions to the literature of this field.

Function of the principal. It is likely that we have advanced to the final stage in the growth of the principalship. The true function of the principal is gradually being defined in the minds of educators. Altho expressed in different ways and with some variations in the emphasis on the amount of independent activity which should be permitted the principal, there is a marked agreement among various authors and thinkers as to the most important duty of the principalship. Above everything else the principal, through his plans, suggestions, activities and guidance, should improve and keep up to a high standard the quality of the instruction of his teachers. He should be the true professional leader of his school.

Activities implied in this function. There is nothing startling, or at first sight, even new in this conception of the primary responsibility of the principal's office. A closer inspection into the duties implied reveals, however, increasing vistas of service to be rendered:

1. The organization of the school should be adapted to the individual child in order to afford him the greatest amount of opportunity for development. This is primarily the responsibility of the principal and will necessitate carefully worked out methods of classification of pupils, and various adaptations of subject matter.

2. The course of study represents another obligation of the principal. It is imperative that he assume the leadership in adapting, in so far as possible, the course of study to the needs of the community represented and to the increasing demands of modern life.

3. Professional leadership also implies improvement in the method of classroom instruction with its accompanying purposeful supervision of classes and adequate, helpful suggestions to teachers. These suggestions must be a part of an organized plan extending beyond mere remarks concerning the work of an isolated class exercise. The principal will thus become the real supervisor of his school.

4. Closely allied to improvement in methods is the training of teachers in service to which task the principal should devote a portion of his time and energy. A prime prerequisite to securing results in this field is a high order of professional enthusiasm on the part of principal and teachers and an excellent spirit of cooperation between them.

5. Administrative and clerical duties should be arranged so that they require but a minor part of the principal's time and energy. The time allotted these duties constitutes the most important problem of the principalship and more than any other factor determines its function. In one investigation¹ of the number of hours given to various activities by a group of principals it was found that administrative and clerical duties received by far the greater portion of their time. In the same study evidence from other contemporary literature is listed which "seems to confirm the belief that administrative routine overshadows in practise the other activities of the principal." No doubt much additional evidence supporting this conclusion could be found in our own observation and experience.

6. The ideal of professional leadership also carries with it an obligation broader than that included in the adequate instruction of pupils. It presupposes attention to the physical, social and moral needs of the pupils and the community. The principal should be a positive factor in any movement for the betterment of civic conditions. One author² has applied the term social duties to activities of this type. An adequate performance of these duties necessitates that the principal gain the friendly regard and confidence of the members of his community.

7. In order to perform adequately his duties the principal must grow in fitness and zeal for his calling. Professional training and continued study are vital requirements in the equipment of any principal who qualifies for the complete fulfilment of his function.

Relation of principal and superintendent. The performance of the activities of the principal in the light of professional leadership as a primary function will bring about a relationship between the principal and superintendent which does not exist in every school system at the present time. It will mean that the principal has a greater scope for independent action. He will have a voice in directing the policies of the school and will be responsible for the inauguration of new plans and ideas. One author³ maintains "that the great function of the school superintendent is not to direct principals

¹Worth, McClure. "The functions of the elementary school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 21:500-14, March, 1921.

²Reavis, W. C. "The duties of a supervising principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:279-84, December, 1918.

³Weet, Herbert S. "The duties of the school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 20:253-63, December, 1919.

but to secure for them, to the very limit of his power, the conditions required for enabling them to work out the problems of their schools." It is clear that with the acceptance of his broader responsibility the principal must accept its accompanying new freedom.

Relation of principal and teachers. The relationship which should exist between the principal and his teachers is analagous to that which should exist between the superintendent and his principals. The teachers should exercise their initiative in planning details of instruction and the principal should be responsible for the general principles necessary for the guidance of school activities. There should be a frank confidence of one in the other, a loyalty of each member of the school body to all others, and a singleness of purpose born of cooperation in the search for ends and in the determinations of means.

A broadening of the field of activities carried on by the principal will probably bring about additional privileges in the selection of his teachers and in the assignment of their duties. As a result there will tend to be greater cooperation and more cordial feeling between principal and teachers and greater degree of fitness on the part of the teachers for their particular grade or special duties. With the responsibility of his selection resting upon him the principal will probably exert himself to prevent anyone of his teachers from an unsatisfactory performance of her duties.

Relation of principal and subject supervision. Any obligation which requires of the principal a large amount of supervision and direction of classroom work will raise the query of what shall be done with the subject supervisor. An efficient performance of supervision by the principal should render subject supervision, as it is now carried on in many systems, superfluous. Chicago¹, perhaps to a greater extent than any other large school system in the United States, has dispensed with subject supervision in favor of supervision by the principal. School men in that city claim that the plan is productive of greater efficiency in school work. The principal because of the closer contact with his teachers afforded by the fact that he is in the same building can follow up the work more adequately than the supervisor who must apportion his time and effort among several buildings. Another reason which is advanced for the superiority of supervision by the principal is that it promotes a greater unity of

¹Lowry, Chas. D. "The work of the principal," Chicago Schools Journal, 5:53-59, October, 1922.

purpose, solidarity of action and more complete and intelligent co-operation than can be hoped for with the supervision given in whole or in part by subject supervisors.

Classification of duties. Certain authors among whom are Nutt¹, Reavis² and Worth³ have given very suggestive classifications of the duties and activities of the principal. Altho the two former authors go into considerable detail in the enumeration of specific duties in contrast to Worth, who states only main divisions with a brief description of the nature of the duties included under each, a great deal of correspondence exists in the three classifications. In fact they cover practically the same range of duties and their distinction depends largely upon the difference in grouping and in emphasis. This will necessarily be true of any classification which has as its basic theory the conception of the elementary school principal as fulfilling the broad function of professional leadership.

With this explanation the following general classification based upon the lines of activity described in the preceding pages is presented:

1. Professional activities: including duties applying to provision for the individual pupil, the course of study, the training of teachers, the supervision of instruction and improvement of methods, and his own professional growth, etc.
2. Administrative activities: including superintendence of the school plant, inspection of buildings and grounds, etc., and management of the school body such as promotion of pupils, schedule of classes, provision for discipline, attendance, tardiness, etc.
3. Clerical activities: including reports, records, inventories, orders of supplies, etc.
4. Social activities: the duties falling under this main heading divide themselves fairly distinctly into two classes: first are those school activities pertaining to the moral, social and physical training of pupils; second are those activities through which the principal takes his place as a leader in his community.

¹Nutt, H. W. "The duties of the elementary school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:174-97, November, 1918.

²Reavis, W. C. "The duties of a supervising principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:279-84, December, 1918.

³Worth, McClure. "The functions of the elementary school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 21:500-14, March, 1921.

Needs of the principalship. A study of contemporary literature¹ together with an analysis of the mistakes made by elementary school principals presented by Bobbitt² suggests a number of requirements which must be met before the principalship can become in reality an office of professional leadership.

1. The vision of principals and of all school men must be clarified in regard to the aim of the principalship. Achievement is unlikely unless the object of achievement is understood.

2. Superintendents must organize their thinking and activities to further the attainment by the principal of his function. He must no longer be merely a clerk or a mouthpiece of the central office.

3. A professional spirit among principals must be developed and must receive constant adherence.

4. Salaries must be increased in order to permit elementary school principals wider opportunities for professional training and growth.

5. Professional courses dealing specifically with the problems of the principalship must be offered in colleges and universities.

6. A literature of the principalship containing both theoretical and specific material must develop.

7. Clerical help for the principal must become more widespread. In a large number of cases it is a prerequisite of the proper performance of the principal's duties.

8. A list of the administrative and clerical duties which should be performed by the principal must be decided upon and adopted as a standard.

9. A technic of performing administrative and clerical duties which will allow the principal to delegate certain tasks to other members of the school staff must be worked out.

10. A technic of supervision of instruction should be developed which will include definite educational objectives and which will provide for adequate and efficient suggestions to teachers, and for methods of following up these suggestions.

¹The study by McClure Worth on this was especially helpful.

²Bobbitt, Franklin. "Mistakes often made by a principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 20:337-46 and 419-34, January and February, 1920.

A Selected Bibliography

Bobbitt, Franklin. "Mistakes often made by a principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 20:337-46 and 419-34, January and February, 1920.

The mistakes listed in this study were assembled by drawing on the experiences and observations of several hundred superintendents, principals, and teachers. A very important class of errors are those which may be called errors of over-direction. Certain others may be classed as errors of under-direction—as in the case of the principal who fails to organize and direct the work of the school building and leaves the performance of a large number of his duties to the teachers. Since the principal is responsible not only for the administrative and clerical duties but for the efficiency of instruction also he is failing woefully in meeting his most important obligations. Five causes for the mistakes of under-direction are given, together with suggestions for their elimination. Another important class of errors comes from judging the work of teachers on the basis of the wrong type of standards. As far as possible standards for judging work should be objective, clearly defined and known both to the principal and teachers. The errors which occur most frequently, however, are the result of too great an emphasis on administrative and clerical duties and the neglect of improvement of instruction. Many other errors of less frequent occurrence are discussed. Remedies for different mistakes are described briefly. This study will be especially helpful to principals who wish to devote more of their time to professional duties and less to administrative functions.

Boggs, J. "School board regulations concerning the elementary school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 20:730-42, June, 1920.

This study is based upon the assumption that the duties which boards of education and superintendents specifically designate in the rules and regulations as belonging to the principal are those which they consider the most important for the principal to perform. A summary of the requirements concerning the elementary school principal in thirty states of the United States selected at random resulted in a statement of seventy-seven different duties. The seventy-seven duties were distributed according to the classification of the duties of the school principal given by McMurry in the New York City Survey, by Reavis, and by Nutt. "From the examination of these tables it appears that in the judgment of most school boards and superintendents, principals are not merely officers of professional supervision but rather odd job and clerical workers whose business it is to keep the machinery well oiled and smoothly running while other people perform the higher professional functions."

Cubberley¹, Ellwood P. "The principal and principalship," *Elementary School Journal*, 23:342-52, January, 1923.

Mr. Cubberley maintains that the relation which should exist between the principal and superintendent is analogous to that which exists between the main executives

¹As this article goes to press a discussion by Dr. Cubberley of "The principal and the principalship" comes to the writer's notice. It forms Chapter II of a book "The Principal and His School" which is to be published in the near future. The discussion of this chapter is especially significant because of the very careful way in which it has treated the principal in his relation to the administrative organization of the school system.

and the department heads of a large business organization, as for example, between a manager of a town branch of a public utility and the general superintendent of the business. The superintendent is responsible for the general school policies and the principal for their application to his school. The superintendent has a right to expect from the principal unquestioning obedience in carrying out the policies of the school system regardless of whether he approves of them. The principal has a right to expect from the superintendent freedom in working out the details of administration in his own school. Both should cooperate along these lines for the best school system which it is their power to produce.

In discussing the importance of the principalship the author states that the "superintendent should tend to magnify the office of the school principal. Whatever can be done to add strength, dignity, and responsibility should be done with a view to making a principal feel that his work is large and important and that he must keep going if he is to continue to measure up to the demands of the position. Everything pertaining to his school should pass through his hands and the position should be made one of definite and fixed responsibility." He also maintains that generally speaking the principals of schools in the United States do not realize to the full their responsibility. They neglect supervision for administrative and clerical tasks. Altho not greatly to blame always the principal, if he understands fully the nature of his function, can help to remedy this condition. In order to further this understanding "the difference between office-chair administration and clerical perfection on the one hand and helpful and constructive supervision on the other should be clearly set forth and emphasized in the administration of the school system."

Edson, Anthony W. "School principal," *The American School*, 6: 106-107, April, 1920.

This paper contains a suggestive description given in a somewhat condensed form of the responsibilities, duties and opportunities of the elementary school principal. The author states four main purposes of the principalship; (1) organizing the school properly, classifying the pupils, etc. (2) unifying the efforts of all the teachers, thus making their work an integral part of the work of the school, (3) establishing ideals of professional attainment and the standards for that attainment, (4) assuming the leadership in determining results which the school should secure and in directing the attainment of those results.

The principal has two important obligations: one is to teach teachers and to guide them in professional growth; the other is to grow in professional skill himself and to initiate new practises and theories in school activities. A very suggestive discussion is given of the relationship which should exist between the principal and teachers, between the principal and superintendent, between the principal and his community, and between the principal and every child in the school. Certain very helpful specifications as to methods of supervising classroom work are also given. The author closes the article with the standard card for the rating of principals which contains twenty-five different items. This card emphasizes the following classifications and duties of the principal; (1) training of teachers in service, (2) relating the course of study and the work of the school grade to actual conditions of life, (3) the amount of time spent in inspection and supervision in the classroom (4) provision made for the exceptional children, (5) the relation of the principal to parents and the community, (6) the efficiency of the instruction in the school.

Edmunds, S. A. "A principal's duties and responsibilities," *High School Quarterly*, 8:163-66, April, 1920.

This is a discussion in rather general terms of the qualities of character and personality which an ideal school principal should possess.

Gray, William S. "The work of elementary school principals," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:24-35, September, 1918.

In this study the attention is concentrated upon one phase of the principal's work, that of supervision. The performance of this duty adequately and efficiently makes it necessary: (1) that the principal should train his teachers in service; (2) that he should cooperate with his teachers in the making and adaptation of the curriculum; and (3) that in cooperation with his teachers he should work out a list of outcomes, aims, and skills for the judging of instruction. Suggestions which will be found extremely illuminating, are given in regard to the technic of supervision.

Johnston, Charles H., Newlon, Jesse, Pickell, Frank G. *Junior-Senior High School Administration*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922, p. 337-55.

The discussion on the "new conception of the principalship" is written primarily with the high school principal in mind. It contains material, however, which will prove helpful to the elementary school principal. The need for the principal to so regulate his administrative and clerical duties that they will take only a minimum portion of his time is emphasized. The fact is pointed out that the principal should not rely on personal contact with pupils such as changing of programs, adjustment of size of classes, and granting of permissions to strengthen his authority in the school, but that he should establish his leadership through activities of greater professional importance. Two factors "which determine what may be called the spirit of administration and which affect very materially the morale of the school" are discussed in considerable detail. "The first of these has to do with the cooperation of the faculty (or lack of it) in the solution of the institutional problems of the school." A spirit of cooperation and a unity of purpose will be found where the principal endeavors to bring to its fullest expression the ability possessed by each of his teachers through permitting them a voice in the decisions of school problems, and through securing their cooperation in all matters pertaining to the policy and activities of the school. "A deadening of every spark of real interest in the institutional problems of the school" will result where the principal makes it understood that the teachers are to do nothing but "teach and take orders." The second factor which plays a large part in determining the morale of the school has to do with the social problems arising in the student body. Illustrations of problems peculiar to the high school are given. The methods set forth for their improvement may be adapted advantageously, however, to training pupils of the elementary school in habits of conduct suitable to life in a democracy.

Lowry, Chas. D. "The work of the principal," *Chicago Schools Journal*, 5:53-9, October, 1922.

Superintendent Lowry has given an excellent exposition of the function and the duties of the elementary school principal in the Chicago schools and makes some helpful suggestions concerning the manner in which these duties should be performed. The duties of a principal are classified into at least four divisions; administrator,

supervisor, instructor, and councilor. Each of these main divisions is discussed in some detail. The principal must arrange to perform his obligations as administrator without taking too large a portion of his time. He can do this provided he systematizes his work and delegates certain responsibilities to teachers. As a supervisor of his school the needs of individual pupils and changes in the course of study will claim his attention. As an instructor he must train his teachers so that they will grow in professional ability and in zeal for their work. He should allow them the same right to exercise their initiative that he is allowed by the central office. They should be permitted to work out details and teaching devices. In the final analysis the efficiency of instruction in the school depends upon the principal. He is responsible for all the work of his school and for interpreting to the teachers all the policies of the superintendent.

Mirick, George A. "Administration and supervision," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:285-90, December, 1918.

This study maintains that the time has come when administration and supervision must be entirely separated. It affirms that they are unlike, that different training, different experience, and different qualities are required for their performance and that they are so highly specialized that one person can not give adequate attention to both. It also asserts that, of the two, administration always crowds out supervision when they compete for the time and attention of one who has both responsibilities.

Nutt, H. W. "The duties of the elementary school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:174-97, November, 1918.

The author classifies the duties of the school principal under two main heads: I, administrative duties; and II, teaching or pedagogical duties. Administrative duties may be divided into three main groups; (1) annual and semi-annual routine duties, (2) daily routine duties, (3) miscellaneous routine duties. The duties falling under each of these three divisions are specified. Teaching or pedagogical duties take three forms; (1) teaching classes, (2) supervising teaching, and (3) adapting the subject matter and courses of study to pupils. Certain suggestions as to the proper performance of these duties are given. The preceding classification is not based on scientific evaluations but on the author's personal experience and observation.

Power, Leonard. "The plan of supervision and instruction by principals of elementary schools," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:408-18, February, 1919.

According to the plan worked out and put into operation by Mr. Power, after making his decision as to which of the school subjects should be studied, he arranged a schedule so that he could pay two visits to each teacher of that particular school subject. During his visit he considered six points; (a) type of lesson, (b) work done by students during the study period if observed, (c) the order and method of procedure in the recitation, (d) the amount of preparation by the teacher, (e) the assignment, (f) the position of the teacher. With these points as a frame work he wrote a report to each teacher after his visit to her class. He next arranged for each teacher to visit some other teacher of her subject and report on the work of the class. The last step in the plan was a meeting of all the teachers of the subject in order to correlate the work, to ask and give suggestions, and to make plans for the future.

Reavis, W. C. "The duties of a supervising principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 19:279-84, December, 1918.

According to Mr. Reavis the principal should be regarded as the responsible head of his school and as such his duties may be classed as managerial, professional and social in character.

I. Managerial duties. A successful performance of the first type of duty implies satisfactory results secured with a minimum amount of time.

II. Professional duties. "It is not the professional duty of the principal to formulate the educational policy of his school but to interpret for the teachers of his school the policy formulated by the superintendent and special supervisors and to direct the teachers along the lines that will produce the best results for the children of the school." His inspection of classes should be purposeful and not given in a random fashion. His personal opinion should be supplemented by the results of scientific tests and careful educational studies.

III. Social duties. Social duties of the principal include cooperation in parent-teacher organizations, organization of activities, and development of neighborhood cooperation in the necessary civic improvements of the school district.

Rich, Steven G. "Rating of principals and superintendents," *Education*, 42:496-500, April, 1922.

Mr. Rich asserts that the principal should have his teachers make ratings of himself and gives a list of topics to serve as a basis for the ratings. In this list there is little emphasis on the principal's ability as a supervisor but considerable emphasis on his spirit of cooperation with the teachers and on his ability to perform administrative duties. Sixty-nine points out of a possible 100 have been given to these two items.

Spencer, Roger A. "The work of the school principal in supervision," *Elementary School Journal*, 20:176-87, November, 1919.

Some of the problems which will confront the supervising principal are pointed out together with suggestions which should prove very helpful in solving these problems: (1) the principal must have the confidence of his teachers so that they all work toward the same purpose; (2) he must endeavor to make his school meet the needs of the community in which it is located; (3) everything which is not taken care of in a specific manner by the course of study mapped out by the central office must be planned for in the school in which it is to be put in operation, and should be planned for in co-operation with the teachers; (4) the principal must stimulate his teachers to keep out of a rut and to do original work chiefly to promote a better training of the child for independent thinking; (5) teachers must be trained in service, and methods for accomplishing this are given.

Stevens, Eugene C. "The evaluation of the individual in the administrative force," *American School Board Journal*, 60:27-9, June, 1920.

A survey chart for the purpose of rating a principal's ability is given in this paper. It is based on the writer's observation and personal experience. The principals are to be rated on fourteen items by means of letters A, B, C, D, or E, with A meaning highest rating.

Weet, Herbert S. "The duties of a school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 20:253-62, December, 1919.

The author states that the fundamental duty of a school principal is to act as a professional leader in securing in his school the closest possible realization of the ends of education which have been conceived in this country. Some of the duties growing out of this concept of a principal's fundamental obligations are given and discussed.

Worth, McClure. "Professionalizing the principalship," *Elementary School Journal*, 21:735-43, June, 1921.

Information for this study was collected from city superintendents, university professors of education and from elementary school principals of Seattle, Washington. Their replies indicate that the office of principal is being elevated to the plane of professional leadership in the following ways: (1) higher standards of training are being required of the candidates for positions; (2) chief emphasis in determining promotion is being placed upon professional items; (3) principals are practically freed from classroom instruction; (4) the principal is receiving clerical help; (5) there is a tendency to limit the size of schools to 1000 or 1500 pupils, as a school of this size is not so large but that the principal can be the real professional leader of his school; (6) a large number of principals are making an effort to secure better professional training and show evidence of real professional leadership; (7) the salary of the elementary school principal is increasing; (8) the fact that in a great many cases the principal is allowed to modify the course of study admits him to the company of educational experts; (9) the importance of the principal as a leader in his community is indicated by the present tendency to assign him only one building.

Worth, McClure. "The functions of the elementary school principal," *Elementary School Journal*, 21:500-14, March, 1921.

The purpose of this investigation is to answer two questions: (1) what are the functions of the elementary school principal in theory and in practise; (2) what is their relative importance in theory and in practise?

Fifteen university professors and a committee of secondary school principals agreed upon the following classification of the principal's duties; (1) administrative, manager of activities, cases of discipline, (2) clerical reports, bookkeeping, (3) supervision of teaching, including guiding and training of teachers, (4) professional study and growth, (5) community leadership. The results of a rating by fifteen university professors and twelve superintendents of large cities of the five types of duties showed that in theory the supervisory function is considered by far the most important. Administration ranks second. Evidence concerning the relative importance in actual practise of the principal's functions was obtained from records of principals in Seattle and from the distribution of 100 points by thirteen university professors in respect to their judgment of present practise and from current literature concerning the principalship. The results of the latter investigation show that in actual practise administration and routine clerical duties take precedence over supervision, that administration is by far the most important function as determined by the amount of time spent thereon, that clerical work is practically second in importance, and that very little attention is given to community leadership and to professional study. The fundamental reasons for the difference in practise and theory are discussed and suggestions to meet the needs of the situation are given.

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- No. 12. Monroe, Walter S. Announcements of the Bureau of Educational Research for 1922-23.
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- No. 14. Streitz, Ruth. Gifted Children and Provisions for Them in Our Schools.
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